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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 001179

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G/TIP FOR JENNIFER DONNELLY

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TAGS: PGOV PREF PHUM BO

SUBJECT: GOB'S EGO OUTSTRIPS ACTIONS IN ANTI-TIP EFFORTS

REF: MINSK 1031

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

**¶1.** (C) The GOB and the International Organization for Migration recently co-hosted an international conference that sought to bolster cooperation between source and destination countries in the battle against trafficking in persons (TIP). At the conference, GOB officials stressed the importance of a global approach to TIP, urged increased cooperation with NGOs, and announced its willingness to share its best practices with other countries. Yet, despite its claims of expertise, much work remains for the GOB to do in Belarus to better combat TIP, including fully implementing the recently passed anti-TIP legislation and building bridges with existing anti-TIP NGOs. End summary.

**¶2.** (U) On October 26 and 27, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the GOB, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe co-hosted an international conference aimed at bolstering cooperation between source and destination countries in the battle against trafficking in persons (TIP). Representatives from 40 countries, including countries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, 13 international organizations (IOs) and 10 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the conference. Following numerous opening presentations from country and IO representatives on their best anti-TIP practices, the conference focused on three main sessions: labor exploitation (chaired by the International Labor Organization), child protection (chaired by UNICEF), and law enforcement cooperation (chaired by U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime).

GOB Stresses International Approaches to Combating TIP

**¶3.** (U) GOB officials at the conference repeatedly stressed the importance of international cooperation between source, transit, and destination countries in order to eliminate TIP. They highlighted the UNGA's recent adoption of the Belarus-sponsored resolution, "Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons." This resolution focused on a global approach to eradicating TIP and called for the creation of an international coordination group with headquarters in Vienna. Conversely, Poloff's presentation at the conference underscored the importance of furthering regional and bilateral cooperation between governments and cooperation between governments and the international organizations and NGOs that are already committed to eradicating TIP within their countries.

## Belarus Ready to Share Its (Feeble) Best Practices

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¶4. (C) Interior Minister Vladimir Naumov announced at the conference that Belarus is ready to share its best practices in combating TIP with other countries. He referenced the strides Belarus made in anti-TIP legislation, particularly in more stringent licensing requirements for modeling, advertising and foreign-employment agencies. Naumov claimed that these registration measures were "preventative" and do not "hamper the departure of our citizens outside the republic." (Note: Shortly after the anti-TIP legislation was passed, the GOB refused to allow a group of FLEX students to study in the U.S. for academic year 2005-2006. End note.) At a press conference that Interior Ministry hosted on October 25, IOM Anti-TIP Director Danziger agreed that Belarus has forged a "comprehensive regulatory framework" that incorporates IOM's recommendations but noted that the GOB still must implement its anti-TIP legislation.

## Cooperation with NGO/IOS Important But Still Weak

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¶5. (C) Naumov also stressed the importance of cooperation between the government and NGOs and international organizations. Naumov stated, "If we don't cooperate with them, we cannot speak of full-scale prevention." Yet, despite Naumov's statement, IOM Minsk Office Director Dejan Keserovic told Ambassador on October 6 that after 14 months, the GOB still has not registered its USAID-funded anti-TIP project on economic empowerment of women. This delay continues even after the enormous effort IOM put forth into organizing this conference at the request of the GOB.

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## Success Stories of GOB International Anti-TIP Efforts

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¶6. (U) During his presentation, Director of the Belarusian Center for Combating TIP Peter Plop described two recent examples of international cooperation between law enforcement agencies where information provided by Belarusian authorities led to the arrests of traffickers in Germany and Spain. He also announced that Belarusian authorities detected approximately 500 trafficking-related offenses and identified 450 victims of trafficking. (Note: These 500 offenses were not specifically defined as trafficking cases; therefore, this number most likely overestimates the number of trafficking crimes since it includes a wider spectrum of trafficking-related crimes. End note.)

## Comment

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¶7. (C) While the conference was a good opportunity for representatives from different countries to establish contacts, it did little to provide recommendations on how to increase international cooperation on a practical level. The conference was an opportunity for the GOB to brag about its anti-TIP accomplishments and to further build its international reputation as a country that is serious about combating TIP. However, the GOB's emphasis on a global approach to TIP duplicates efforts of other international organizations and will likely not be nearly as effective as a regional approach. Additionally, the GOB's focus on establishing itself as an "international player" is drawing its attention away from the serious work that remains in Belarus, including increasing cooperation with NGOs and IOs that are committed to fighting TIP (reftel). While the GOB made some steps in 2005 with the passage of tougher anti-TIP legislation, much work remains to ensure that the implementation does not infringe on the rights of Belarusians.

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**Stewart**